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To the Citizens of Fairfax County:

I am pleased to present to you the Fiscal Year 2006 Adopted Budget Plan. This budget represents a balance between funding the various responsibilities of government with further real estate tax rate reductions.

With a historic thirteen-cent property tax rate reduction, the FY 2006 General Fund revenue is increasing \$189.1 million, or 6.76%, over the FY 2005 Budget Plan for a total of \$3.0 billion. General Fund Disbursements, which include the Schools transfer and School debt service, are \$3.0 billion, a \$162.7 million, or 5.7% increase over FY 2005. Direct Expenditures, not counting transfers, such as to the Schools and Metro, increased \$30.0 million, or 3.0% over FY 2005.

In order to better address the needs of our homeowners, the Board of Supervisors approved the largest real estate tax rate reduction in modern history. The FY 2006 rate of \$1.00 per \$100 of assessed value is a 13 cent reduction from FY 2005 and a 23 cent reduction from the FY 2002 level. The average homeowner will pay \$578.20 less in taxes in FY 2006 than they would have without the historic tax cut. The tax rate reductions since FY 2002 have saved the average homeowner a cumulative \$1,664.55 compared to what they would have paid if no rate reductions had taken place.

When the Board of Supervisors received the authority from the State to increase the hotels, cigarette and recordation taxes last year, we did so with the proviso that every additional cent raised from these alternative revenue sources be set aside for real estate tax relief. The FY 2006 Budget relies upon these sources, as well as additional budget reductions, to fund the real estate tax rate cut.

Education remains the focus of the budget, once again receiving approximately 52% of the total General Fund Disbursements. The transfer for School operating expenses totals \$1.56 billion, an increase of \$112.7 million, or 8.24% over the FY 2005 level. This budget represented a concerted effort of compromise between the Board of Supervisors and the School Board. In recognition of the need for increased tax rate reduction, the School Superintendent voluntarily reduced the original Schools' request of 9.7% to the Board's guideline. The subsequent approval of that reduction by the School Board is an example of the increasing cooperation between our two bodies.

The FY 2006 Budget continues our commitment to public safety. Public safety is one area in which costs are rising and represents the second largest portion of our budget. We are one of the safest jurisdictions in the country. Fairfax County has one of the lowest crime rates of any jurisdiction our size. Yet as our population continues to grow, we must expand our public safety coverage to maintain that level of safety. In this budget, we are opening a new fire station in Western Fairfax. Fairfax County also has the lowest police officer-to-citizen ratios of any jurisdiction our size, but with the growing threat of gangs in our region and the ongoing need for emergency preparedness in the post 9/11 environment, we are adding 12 new police officers to our department to maintain the safety of our residents.

The FY 2006 Budget dedicates one penny's worth of the real estate tax rate towards stormwater management. Effective management of storm drainage not only aids our community to avert sedentary erosion, it also reduces the likelihood of standing water and diseases such as West Nile Virus that thrive in those conditions. Managing unnatural stormwater drainage and erosion also preserves and protects our streams and waterways.

Rising real estate prices not only affect existing homeowners, they also make it increasingly difficult for those on a limited budget to find affordable housing in Fairfax County. To address this need, the Budget dedicates one penny's worth of the real estate tax rate towards affordable housing preservation. Only 30% of our police and firefighters live in Fairfax County. The Board's actions will help make it affordable for those who protect us in Fairfax to live in Fairfax.

The challenge of the Fiscal Year 2006 Budget was to lower the real estate tax rate to its lowest level while sustaining the strategic investments in education, public safety and public facilities such as parks, libraries and athletic fields that have fashioned a quality of life in Fairfax County that is the envy of the United States. With the tireless work and effort of many people within the County, we have met this challenge.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gerald E. Connolly', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

Gerald E. Connolly